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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/212, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on progress made in international cooperation in the field of disasters associated with natural hazards. The report highlights the key challenges faced by the international community in strengthening the capacity of disaster-prone countries in disaster preparedness and response, post-disaster recovery and disaster risk reduction.

Pursuant to resolution 57/150, the report also includes an update on the activities of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group since December 2002.

* A/60/150.
** The report was delayed for technical reasons.

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I. Introduction

1. In the present report, the expression "natural disasters" will not be used, as it conveys the mistaken assumption that disasters occurring as a result of natural hazards are wholly "natural", and therefore inevitable and outside human control. Instead, it is widely recognized that such disasters are the result of the way individuals and societies relate to threats originating from natural hazards. The nature and scale of threats inherent in hazards vary. The risks and potential for disasters associated with natural hazards are largely shaped by prevailing levels of vulnerability and measures taken to prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters. Thus, disasters are, to a great extent, determined by human action, or the lack of it. The expression "disasters associated with natural hazards" will therefore be used, in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Kobe (Hyogo, Japan) from 18 to 22 January 2005.

2. The incidence and severity of disasters associated with natural hazards continue to increase. Among the main causes are climate change, environmental degradation, increasing levels of vulnerability, inappropriate development patterns and inadequate mitigation and preparedness systems. Furthermore, factors such as climate change, economic globalization and increased air travel are contributing to new trends that highlight the need for a global perspective in relation to disasters, many of which have origins and impacts of a global nature.

3. The number of people and assets affected by disasters is also on the rise, with dramatic consequences for lives, livelihoods and hard-won development gains. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, the economic costs of disasters associated with natural hazards have increased fourteen-fold since the 1950s.

4. The close link between disasters and inappropriate development models is well documented. Unsustainable development patterns can generate new disaster risks. Urbanization and the concentration of people in hazard-prone areas are but two examples. Disasters are also closely correlated with poverty, as low-income countries are disproportionately affected by them. Poor people tend to be more exposed to threats and are less able to absorb the shocks inherent in disasters. People with few resources or alternatives are also less able to recover from disasters.

5. In this context, it is clear that existing and future levels of risk will slow down or undermine efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, any progress made in reaching the goals will not automatically contribute to a reduction in human vulnerability to natural hazards. The international community must therefore ensure that well-meaning efforts to increase social and economic development do not inadvertently increase disaster risk.

6. The tight link existing between disasters, unsustainable development and weak governance points to the fallacy of the distinction that is usually made within the humanitarian community between disasters associated with natural hazards and other types of emergencies that necessitate humanitarian action. In all cases, the way in which societies are organized is a key determinant of vulnerability levels and of whether these result in the need for humanitarian assistance. In all cases, upheaval, or the breakdown of coping mechanisms, stems from inequitable or unsustainable

patterns of resource distribution. In sum, disasters associated with natural hazards are best viewed as human-induced phenomena that exacerbate human vulnerability.

7. A growing number of countries are faced with multipronged crises where disasters associated with natural hazards and complex emergencies reinforce and feed into one another. This was the case, most visibly in recent years, in the Bahr el Ghazal famine in southern Sudan in 1997-1998 and in the drought in Afghanistan in 1999-2001. In both cases, the long-standing conflict led to the collapse of local livelihoods (either directly or indirectly, owing to the collapse of the local economy), which in turn reduced the resilience of the local population to natural hazards. In such situations, affected households often have no other recourse than to adopt coping strategies that increase vulnerability to natural hazards, for instance by cutting trees to produce charcoal, thereby contributing to deforestation. Conversely, some disasters have been instrumental in aggravating societal tensions, as was the case in Nicaragua after the 1972 earthquake.

8. Disasters may be both a consequence and a cause of environmental degradation. Urban and agricultural frontier expansion have transformed surrounding environments in ways that generate new hazard patterns. Seismic hazards may be significantly greater on reclaimed wetlands and on landfills than in other areas of an urban centre. The destruction of mangroves in coastal areas may increase hazards associated with storm surge. Human settlements in watersheds may modify hydraulic systems and destabilize slopes, thereby increasing flood and landslide hazards. In addition, in many areas the hazards of natural origin interact with those of technological and human origin, such as inadequate waste disposal in riverbeds, industrial waste and mine tailings. Conversely, major disasters, or the accumulation of risk from smaller but regular events, may cause environmental problems that impact on livelihoods and development options, for example where biodiversity is undermined.

9. Women and men, boys and girls are affected differently by disasters: they have different levels of exposure to risk, risk perception and preparedness; the physical and psychological impact of the disaster on them differs, as do their needs in the response, recovery and reconstruction phases. The differential impact of disasters should be borne in mind and addressed by Governments and the international community during all phases, and most importantly during recovery.

II. The year in review

A. Disasters associated with natural hazards

10. The reporting period (July 2004 to June 2005) was dominated by the Indian Ocean tsunami, which accounted for the overwhelming majority of recorded deaths, although for only a small percentage of the persons affected. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, during this period 242,793 lives were lost as a result of disasters associated with natural hazards, with 226,408 people killed by the Indian Ocean tsunami alone. More than 158 million people worldwide were injured, displaced or otherwise adversely affected by disasters associated with natural hazards, with reported economic damage totalling $94 billion.

11. On 26 December 2004 a massive earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale struck the west coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia, followed by numerous and often severe aftershocks. The quake triggered powerful tsunamis that wrecked coastal areas of India, Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The tsunami also affected Myanmar, Seychelles, Somalia and Yemen. On 28 March 2005, a powerful aftershock measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale struck the west coast of Sumatra; the islands of Nias, Simeulue and Banyak were the worst affected. The impact of the disaster and the response to it are detailed in the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, recovery and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster (A/60/86-E/2005/77).

12. Disasters as a result of flooding continued to affect the largest number of people worldwide (132 million). In July 2004, heavy monsoon rains caused extensive flooding in a large area of Bangladesh. The floods killed more than 600 people, displaced 1.7 million and affected as many as 34 million people, destroying nearly 1 million houses and more than 1.4 million acres of farmland.

13. The 2004 hurricane season was particularly harsh in the Caribbean. Four hurricanes — Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne — caused damaging floods between August and October. Ivan, the most powerful hurricane to hit the region in a decade, strengthened into category 4 as it struck Grenada, bringing sustained winds of 220 kilometres per hour. About 90 per cent of Grenada's homes were damaged and some 60,000 people were left homeless. Tropical storm Jeanne became a hurricane after passing over Puerto Rico, and then weakened as it moved across the island of Hispaniola. In the Dominican Republic, some 38,000 people were displaced; bridges, highways and the water supply system were damaged. In Haiti, the eastern coastal city of Gonaïves was the most severely affected; 1,500 people were killed and 300,000 were injured or suffered property damage. The flood waters did not recede for months owing to drainage problems. Because of the long-standing political and social conflict, significant degradation of the natural environment, and the considerable losses resulting from the floods of May 2004, Haiti was not able to cope with the consequences of the disaster and required significant international assistance.

14. In November-December 2004 a series of typhoons and storms triggered landslides and flash floods in the Philippines, leading to over 1,000 deaths and more than 500 persons reported missing, and causing widespread damage, particularly on the eastern coast of the main island of Luzon. Houses, infrastructure and agricultural crops were flattened and covered by a thick layer of mud, fallen trees and logs.

15. In January 2005, torrential rains caused severe flooding in the densely populated coastal regions of Guyana, including the capital, Georgetown. Over 300,000 people — almost half of the country's population — were affected, of whom one third were children under nine years of age. The flooding was compounded by drainage problems resulting from limited pumping capacity and poor maintenance of drainage systems.

16. Early in 2005 most of the Central Asian region suffered from adverse weather conditions; heavy rains and snowfall were reported throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan. In Pakistan up to 700,000 persons were affected and 486 died. In the northern areas of the country heavy snowfalls led to avalanches that left several mountain villages and a total of 140,000 persons isolated. In western

Pakistan nearly three weeks of heavy rains resulted in severe flooding, which in turn led to the collapse of a major dam in Sind province. In Balochistan province up to 80 per cent of the crops were lost. Although the Government of Pakistan did not officially request international assistance and provided over $2.3 million worth of relief aid, the international community contributed more than $4 million worth of assistance.

17. Eastern and southern Tajikistan also experienced heavy snowfall, with nearly 2 million people affected in the Rasht valley. Heavy rains in the Khatlon region further damaged the infrastructure that had already been adversely affected by high levels of snowfall. Although the scope of the disaster was daunting, the rapid response of the Government and the international community ensured that casualty rates remained low, with 16 confirmed deaths.

18. In Afghanistan, severe weather conditions early in 2005 led to the death of over 100 people. Heavy snowfall closed several key link roads, hampering the delivery of badly needed foodstuffs to populations in the south.

19. From April to December 2004, large swarms of desert locusts destroyed millions of hectares of crops and grazing land in 10 West and North African countries. In some areas of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, the price of food — especially millet — doubled, while prices for undernourished cattle and other livestock plummeted. Although repeated warnings were issued well in advance, donor support for dealing with the infestation picked up only after the destruction was well under way. The strategy adopted concentrated on fighting the pest, and insufficient attention was given to mitigating the impact of the infestation on local livelihoods and the environment. While this locust infestation was the worst in a decade, the problem is a recurrent one that calls for a more systematic, preventative approach.

20. On 22 February 2005, an earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale struck the Zarand district in Kerman province of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The earthquake caused extensive damage to an area of 1,000 square kilometres inhabited by some 75,000 people, directly affecting more than 32,000 people. Fifty villages were damaged, some were completely destroyed, 612 people were confirmed dead and 1,500 were injured. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran was quick to mobilize search and rescue teams as well as the national network of non-governmental organizations and the Red Crescent society to meet the immediate needs of the affected population. No appeal was issued but several United Nations agencies provided immediate relief assistance.

21. Chronic disasters such as health epidemics, drought and famine continued to take a heavy toll on the populations of developing countries. Droughts alone affected more than 20 million people worldwide. In August 2004, the drought in Afghanistan entered its sixth year as rain and snowfall remained significantly below average. While most of the country was affected by the drought, 14 provinces were acutely affected and up to 37 per cent of the population — or 11.1 million people — were not able to cover their basic food and other needs. The drought further exacerbated the already high level of vulnerability of the population, which has been subjected to nearly 25 years of conflict.

22. In the Horn of Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa, natural hazards — including drought, erratic rains, locust infestation and floods — coupled with

chronic problems such as poverty, conflict, poor governance and HIV/AIDS, affected millions of people, including farmers, pastoral and agropastoral groups. As a result, over 12 million people in the Horn of Africa, over 7 million in West Africa, and 10 million in Southern Africa will require food assistance in 2005. In several countries, including Mali, Mauritania and Niger, vulnerable populations suffered from severe malnutrition. The combination of recurrent natural hazards and chronic problems calls for comprehensive and multi-level responses.

23. In March 2005 an epidemic of Marburg haemorrhagic fever was declared in Angola. By late June 2005, 392 cases and 354 deaths had been recorded, making it the deadliest and most intense outbreak of Marburg fever ever. There is no cure available and the lethality of the virus in this case is 90 per cent. Neither the source of the outbreak nor the reservoir where the virus hides between outbreaks is known. Inadequate health-care facilities, undertrained staff and insufficient medicine and equipment initially contributed to worsening the situation. Hospital-borne transmission of the virus scared people away from the main hospital in Uige city, leaving the sick and the dead — who are highly contagious — to be cared for in their communities. Regaining the local population's trust proved extremely difficult, despite intense social mobilization efforts, the involvement of traditional leaders and healers and a targeted campaign to end widespread risk behaviours such as funeral rituals or the multiple use of syringes. Although the virus remains contained in Uige and has not spread nationwide, the cycle of transmission has not been stopped and the virus is still active.

24. While large-scale disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami attracted great international attention, most of the disasters that took place in the reporting period were smaller in scale and as such did not make international headlines. Regrettably, the international community continued to favour high-profile emergencies at the expense of less visible disasters that were far from the media or political spotlight, and where the brunt of the response and recovery effort was borne by the affected communities and countries. This trend was clearly reflected in funding patterns. For instance, while donors provided 82 per cent of the $1.26 billion dollars requested in the United Nations appeal for the Indian Ocean tsunami, the appeal to help drought victims in Djibouti brought in only 5.3 per cent of the 7.5 million dollars required. The tsunami disaster starkly demonstrated that extraordinary levels of funding are achievable, provided there is political commitment and will. "Low-profile" disasters deserve greater attention, not only because they cause massive human suffering, but also because they impose heavy losses and set back development in low-income and the least developed countries. As these disasters tend to occur or recur over a long period of time, they need to be addressed from a longer-term perspective.

B. World Conference on Disaster Reduction

25. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Kobe (Hyogo, Japan) from 18 to 22 January 2005, represents a landmark in worldwide understanding of the need to implement a disaster reduction agenda in a comprehensive manner, covering prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Such an understanding is captured in the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, which were adopted at the Conference. The Hyogo Framework for Action complements the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World (1994) by identifying the

collective and individual roles and responsibilities of key parties in its implementation and follow-up. The Conference and its follow-up are discussed in greater detail in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/60/180).

III. Key challenges

26. National Governments, local institutions and affected communities have primary responsibility for disaster management. These actors are best placed to recognize and address disaster risk accumulation in their own environment, and represent the first line of response in case of disaster. The importance of active participation in disaster management by local communities in particular has been widely recognized.

27. In this context, the role of the international community is first and foremost to support and strengthen local, national and regional capacities for disaster management. While this proposition is widely accepted, in practice many international actors continue to have difficulties in envisaging their role as primarily a supporting one. As far as the United Nations is concerned, the overarching constraint is the lack of sufficient human and financial resources for risk reduction and disaster management.

A. Disaster preparedness

28. Notwithstanding some worthwhile gains in the past decade, much needs to be done to reach a satisfactory level of preparedness. The level of commitment and the resources available for preparedness remain inadequate at both the national and the international level.

29. While the preparedness of disaster-prone countries needs to be enhanced at all levels, particular emphasis should be placed on the community level, as local communities are the first and primary actors in the early relief efforts. Activities aimed at raising the level of preparedness of local communities should take due account of local realities, indigenous coping mechanisms and perceptions of risk.

30. Regional organizations play an important role in disaster preparedness. In the eastern Caribbean, a regional initiative — the Eastern Caribbean Donor Group — has been established to support the coordination of external emergency assistance in case of a major natural or technological disaster. Each year before the hurricane season, an operations order is revised to channel assistance by international organizations and donors to affected countries. In June 2005, a regional meeting was held in Cuba to discuss the level of preparedness of the countries of the region and to update their emergency plans.

31. The continued lack of adequate funding for preparedness is troubling. Paradoxically, it is still much easier to mobilize support for post-disaster relief efforts than for preparedness and mitigation activities that would avoid or minimize the loss of life and the destruction of vital assets and infrastructure. This is in part due to the fact that in both United Nations and donor budgets, funding for preparedness falls in between humanitarian budgets, from which response funds are

drawn, and development budgets, from which funding for other aspects of disaster management is drawn.

Institutional and legal framework

32. Disaster risk reduction competes with a variety of national priorities and development needs, and often receives little attention in budgeting and resource allocation. The main challenge is therefore to promote or strengthen lean but effective institutional frameworks that recognize the role and contribution of each stakeholder through a process of participation, empowerment and knowledge sharing at all levels.

33. Embedding disaster preparedness, response and risk management mechanisms into national governance structures is a process that requires years of sustained support and commitment from the international community and national Governments. Alternative solutions to the traditional project approach, with a usual duration of two to three years, must be explored. One approach is to mainstream disaster preparedness and risk reduction concerns into broader governance and poverty reduction programmes that are likely to run in longer cycles, and to boost the capacities and engagement of high-risk countries with the deployment of disaster response and risk reduction advisers.

34. Disaster-related legislation and regulatory frameworks — within the context of strengthened national systems — are essential to creating an enabling environment for disaster risk reduction. Legal reform processes are therefore a necessary component of any disaster-related capacity-building endeavour.

Standby arrangements

35. While international standby arrangements — such as the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams and those under the auspices of the International Humanitarian Partnership — are well developed, the need to establish similar intergovernmental mechanisms in disaster-prone regions is only beginning to be recognized. The Asia-Pacific Humanitarian Partnership, comprising Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, is in the process of being established. Discussions have also commenced concerning the creation of similar support mechanisms in the Americas region. International support for the development of standby arrangements in disaster-prone countries is still insufficient, however.

Contingency planning

36. Contingency planning is a demanding exercise. The main challenges lie on the one hand in overcoming doubts about the usefulness of the exercise, and on the other hand in institutionalizing, operationalizing and continually developing such plans. Contingency planning should be seen as an ongoing preparedness mechanism rather than as a one-off exercise. Emphasis should be placed not only on the planning phase, but also on building local capacity to operationalize the plan. Often contingency plans are developed in isolation, without any linkage to national disaster preparedness plans or the contingency plans of the United Nations country team or individual international organizations. In order to link national and United Nations contingency plans in a more systematic way, contingency planning exercises should be organized on a regular basis with the participation of all relevant

actors. This would allow stakeholders to identify possible gaps and coordinate better among themselves.

37. Humanitarian contingency planning has become standard practice among United Nations actors in the field, including United Nations country teams. This marks a radical change in modus operandi within the United Nations system at global, regional and country levels. Contingency planning tools will need to be continually enhanced to meet the growing challenges faced in the field, particularly in terms of standardizing the application of the planning process, ensuring that follow-up actions are carried out, and involving communities and governments.

Early warning

38. In order to be effective, early warning systems should address multiple hazards, be people-centred and include awareness-raising activities. It is essential to focus on the local level, helping communities and local governments to take simple disaster mitigation measures and put elementary early warning and evacuation systems into place. These systems should consist of basic communication chains that can best ensure that the warning is received, communicated and acted upon by the affected communities.

39. The newly established Humanitarian Early Warning Web Service (www.hewsweb.org), presented at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, was developed under the leadership of the World Food Programme (WFP) Sub-Working Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. It represents the first global clearing house for early warning information on natural hazards. The Sub-Working Group is currently discussing with national and regional bodies the possibility of using this Web service to support local capacities and structures.

Awareness-raising

40. Experience shows that local communities are often keenly sensitive to the threat of disasters, but are uncertain how best to protect themselves from their impact. More systematic efforts are needed to empower local and national Governments to raise communities' awareness of their exposure to hazards and of means to protect themselves and their assets and to reduce risk. These efforts should build on local knowledge and involve the formal and non-formal education systems, the media and other relevant actors.

B. Disaster response

41. The principle of subsidiarity of international assistance is well established, and entails that the Government of the affected country not only has primary responsibility for assisting the victims of a disaster, but also has the authority to coordinate and direct all available assistance.

42. The international community should therefore make it a priority to strengthen the response capacity of disaster-prone countries. International support to Governments can serve as an opportunity to improve the population's faith in the Government, as well as to enhance Governments' capacity to respond to future disasters.

43. Regional organizations in disaster-prone regions can play an important role in disaster response, as they have unparalleled knowledge of local conditions and prior relationships with national decision makers. The level of involvement of regional organizations in disaster response has so far been mixed, however. While some organizations have developed disaster response mechanisms, others have not paid much attention to disasters affecting their region.

44. The international emergency response system plays an important role in major disasters, when the capacity of affected countries to cope is overwhelmed. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, international actors should refrain from delivering assistance without prior consultation with, and the explicit consent of, the Government. They should also seek to strengthen established coordination mechanisms, rather than bypassing them.

45. One of the main challenges faced in the interaction between national and international relief actors is the lack of a common approach and of a shared understanding of terminology, definitions and standards. National authorities often have limited knowledge of the complexity, culture and working procedures of the international system, while international agencies and individual aid workers have little knowledge of — and often little consideration for — the specific context in which they operate.

46. The participation of beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of relief programmes remains largely insufficient. Specific mechanisms should be devised to enhance the accountability of all providers of relief assistance to beneficiaries. The provision of assistance should be driven solely by the needs of the affected populations, rather than by the priorities of the providers.

Role of the Governments of affected countries in coordinating relief assistance

47. Governments of affected countries often face great difficulties in coordinating national and international relief assistance. The large number of often diverse actors creates acute coordination challenges, particularly during the first weeks of the response to a sudden-onset disaster. Local authorities are often themselves weakened by human and material losses, and often have to cope with unclear reporting lines and interference from various government bodies. Some non-governmental actors are unwilling or unaware of the need to coordinate. Even international organizations with a long history of involvement in humanitarian operations at times take initiatives without prior consultation, in some cases bypassing the Government. At times, the coordination mechanisms put in place by Governments are weak, which encourages some actors to take unilateral action.

Role of the United Nations in coordinating international assistance

48. The United Nations Resident Coordinator plays a key role in coordinating international assistance. The Resident Coordinator reports to the Emergency Relief Coordinator during the emergency and is backed by the disaster management team, which should mirror the structure of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and include the Red Cross movement and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The capacity of United Nations country teams to coordinate international assistance remains uneven, however. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Programme have conducted training programmes, particularly in the Latin American and

Caribbean regions, to enhance such capacity; they should be replicated elsewhere, with broader participation.

Civil-military relations

49. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster highlighted once again the importance of effective coordination between humanitarian and military actors at the local, national and international levels. Cultural and operational differences between the two sets of actors, insufficient understanding of military command structures and inadequate information-sharing can lead to suboptimal and in some cases ineffective coordination. The absence of joint planning may give rise to gaps or duplications in relief efforts. Ensuring the most effective use of military and civil defence assets requires well-defined roles and responsibilities, clear channels of communication, respect for humanitarian space and principles, and an appropriate level of sensitivity within the context of the operating environment.

Administrative bottlenecks

50. By its resolution 57/150, the General Assembly urged Member States to simplify and reduce administrative procedures relating to the entry, deployment and exit of international urban search and rescue teams together with their supplies and equipment. A number of obstacles still exist to the import, transport and distribution of relief goods, the entry and freedom of movement of disaster response organizations and their personnel, and the exchange of disaster-related information. Governments of disasters-prone countries should adopt and — when applicable — update or streamline national procedures for requesting, receiving and coordinating the inflow of international relief teams, services and supplies. A useful tool for facilitating the delivery of relief consignments in response to disasters is the model customs facilitation agreement (text at www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/programs/response/custnet/model_en.html). Negotiated ahead of time, this agreement ensures that appropriate procedures are in place when needed.

Telecommunication

51. Information and telecommunication technology plays a key role in disaster response. The Tampere Convention on the Provision of Telecommunication Resources for Disaster Mitigation and Relief Operations, currently ratified by 31 States, entered into force on 8 January 2005. All Member States are strongly encouraged to ratify the Convention and include appropriate standard operating procedures in national legislation to allow unhindered importation and use of emergency equipment and related human resources for relief efforts. Member States should also develop emergency response telecommunication capacities and establish rosters of telecommunication resources to be made available during emergencies.

Engaging the private sector

52. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster resulted in an unprecedented influx, at all levels of the relief effort, of goods and services from the corporate business community. The opportunity exists to better engage businesses in emergency relief efforts in other parts of the world as well. The United Nations should enhance its capacity to cooperate with the private sector by clarifying internal processes and devoting greater resources to working with businesses. Rapidly matching donation offers with needs is one of the greatest challenges. The creation of a transparent and

fair process, the adoption of clear guidelines (e.g. concerning issues legal issues), the negotiation of standby agreements with companies and improved information-sharing among agencies are ways in which the humanitarian community can better leverage business potential in disaster response.

Mobilization of international emergency funding

53. Current procedures for the mobilization of international resources through the issuance of flash appeals have proved their effectiveness. Further strengthening and standardization of these procedures should continue to receive priority attention. The efficiency of flash appeals could be strengthened by quicker and better needs assessment and a better media strategy, coupled with stronger means to record contributions and monitor their use. Within the context of the United Nations reform, options for more predictable and rapidly deployable resources for humanitarian crises are being considered. In its resolution 2005/4 on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council highlighted the need for enhanced funding mechanisms and recommended to the General Assembly that the Central Emergency Revolving Fund be improved.

C. Post-disaster recovery

54. The recovery process represents a shift in focus from saving lives to restoring livelihoods, building resilience and reducing vulnerability. Experience shows that it is possible to close the gap between relief and development and transform disasters into opportunities for sustainable development. This is the case when efforts are made to support local and national recovery processes at an early stage; when risk reduction considerations are factored into all response and recovery activities including reconstruction planning; and when the synergies between development, humanitarian and other actors involved in the response phase are properly captured.

55. Adequate attention should be paid as early as possible to the recovery effort. The first challenge is to help the affected populations get back on their feet by quickly providing them with opportunities to earn a living. This may be achieved by using local materials for reconstruction, engaging the local workforce (both men and women) in the reconstruction effort and providing equipment, training and microcredit to kick-start local industries, farming, fishing and small businesses. Recovery is more effective when, from the very start, relief operations are undertaken with recovery in mind, so that there is a seamless transition to longer-term recovery interventions. It is important that, from the outset, the goal is to reduce risk while simultaneously creating sustainable livelihood options. The issue of recovery is discussed at greater length in the report of the Secretary-General on the transition from relief to development (A/60/89-E/2005/79).

Planning

56. The participation and active involvement of local communities, institutions, and affected individuals — both women and men — in the planning of recovery efforts is essential. Recovery programming should be based on a sound, participatory assessment of the needs and capacities of the affected population, so that local initiatives, resources and capacities are fully understood and used. This

process should be demand-driven and designed to reach the most vulnerable population. External technical assistance must complement existing capacities, be conceived as supportive and not directive, and entail a transfer of technology, know-how and capacities for increased resilience, risk management and sustainable development.

Coordination

57. Coordination and information-sharing between national and international actors involved in recovery activities are essential to avoid duplications and gaps and to optimize available resources. Information exchange and coordination mechanisms established during the emergency phase must be maintained and enhanced. They should serve as a platform for permanent dialogue and consensus-building between government agencies, civil society, international organizations, donors and lending institutions, where priorities are defined and an adequate picture of roles and responsibilities is drawn and systematically updated.

58. Despite some achievements to date, coordination of recovery efforts remains a challenge and points to the need for more structured and systematic support by the international community so that national and local authorities are in a position to lead the recovery process in a way that maximizes all available support. The recent initiation of the International Recovery Platform that is geared, in part, to assist in the development of common processes and tools for recovery planning and programming, within the larger context of strengthening national capacities, should help to address some of the factors that complicate efforts to bring about strategic and well-coordinated sustainable recovery programmes.

Integrating risk reduction into recovery

59. During the recovery period an important window of opportunity exists for integrating risk reduction concerns into recovery processes. Too often, however, societies affected by a major disaster tend to seek rapid and visible initiatives to restore normalcy, frequently at the cost of more sustainable and durable solutions that truly address the root causes of the disaster. Too often, this "tyranny of haste" works against responsiveness to the different needs of specific segments of the affected population, reducing the likelihood that opportunities for change, risk reduction and sustainable development will be grasped. It is essential to ensure that recovery and reconstruction efforts do not reconstruct pre-disaster risks that contributed to the disaster in the first place, but aim at creating more sustainable livelihoods.

60. Some successes can be reported following the most recent major disasters. In the aftermath of the 2004 hurricanes, the Government of Grenada issued a disaster reduction policy that introduced risk reduction into the whole recovery process. Recovery priorities workshops and sectoral round tables served to ensure the inclusion of risk reduction in sectoral recovery planning. The early recovery frameworks developed in Indonesia, Maldives and Sri Lanka following the Indian Ocean tsunami included disaster reduction from the very early stages.

Gaps in capacities and system-wide mechanisms

61. A vacuum currently exists in terms of capacities and United Nations system-wide mechanisms to support post-disaster recovery. Gaps include areas such as

understanding differences between men's and women's vulnerabilities and their needs following a disaster; suitable assessment methodologies for identifying early recovery needs; and predictable mechanisms for the deployment of technical experts to support recovery planning and programming and the funding of key recovery and vulnerability reduction interventions in a timely fashion. In an attempt to address the planning, funding and knowledge gaps in recovery, United Nations and non-United Nations partners have embarked on the establishment of an International Recovery Platform. The Platform is designed to provide a coordination framework and network for recovery efforts; facilitate the dissemination of lessons learned and the development of common tools and mechanisms for recovery needs assessment, strategy development and programming; provide advice and support on the formulation of recovery plans and programmes; strengthen national capacities for recovery; and facilitate South-South cooperation among disaster-prone countries.

Resource mobilization

62. International assistance tends to reach its peak in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Subsequently, funding levels dramatically drop, so that in most disaster settings insufficient resources are available to support the recovery phase. In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the international community generously contributed resources for early recovery through the flash appeal. The flexibility with which this mechanism was used made it possible to raise resources in the sectors of shelter, livelihoods, microinfrastructure and the environment, thereby allowing for the implementation of recovery plans and programmes without delay. India and Thailand, which did not participate in the flash appeal, reported great difficulties in raising resources for recovery purposes.

D. Disaster risk reduction

63. In order to reduce disaster risks, countries and communities must first identify risk factors, decide what level of risk is acceptable, and then take steps to reduce risks or transfer them away from affected areas. Risk identification involves not only estimating the probabilities of hazard events of differing severities, but also identifying the factors that make socio-economic systems vulnerable to hazards. Very often, there is little that can be done to affect the behaviour of hazards. Risk reduction, therefore, entails reducing vulnerability to hazards.

64. The more risks are reduced, the easier to transfer some portion of the remaining risk from affected populations to insurers or investors through a variety of financial mechanisms that have been developed specifically for this purpose.

65. Disaster risk reduction requires national and community action on a wide range of fronts, including technical and institutional capacity, appropriate policies, and investments designed to bring risks to acceptable levels at an acceptable cost. Supporting the development of such capacity is perhaps the single highest priority on the international disaster reduction agenda. The subject of risk reduction is discussed at greater length in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/60/180).

IV. Update on the activities of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group

A. Responding to earthquakes

66. Since December 2002, international urban search and rescue teams belonging to the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) network from all regions of the world have responded to earthquakes in Boumerdes, Algeria (May 2003), Bam, Islamic Republic of Iran (December 2003), Al Hoceima, Morocco (April 2004) and the Indian Ocean (December 2004), using the deployment and coordination procedures agreed upon in the INSARAG guidelines. The urban search and rescue response was rapid and effective in all disasters. In the aftermath of the response effort, the INSARAG secretariat, located in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, organized lessons-learned meetings with the participation of international responders and the Governments of the affected countries. Participants evaluated the applicability of the INSARAG methodology in all phases of the response operation and made recommendations for improving the methodology that were later incorporated in the INSARAG guidelines. The meetings resulted, among other things, in an exchange of letters between the European Commission and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs defining the coordination concepts of these organizations in countries outside the European Union, and confirming the INSARAG guidelines as the standard for international coordination in earthquakes.

B. Earthquake response exercises

67. The INSARAG secretariat, supported by the Governments of Colombia, the Philippines and Armenia, organized earthquake response exercises in the earthquake-prone cities of Bogotá (October 2003), Manila (January 2004) and Yerevan (June 2005). During the exercises, national authorities practised the modalities of handling and coordinating incoming international urban search and rescue teams. The exercises enabled international response teams from the respective regions to work closely with national authorities of earthquake-prone countries in accordance with the INSARAG guidelines. The INSARAG methodology was also introduced and practised in the earthquake exercises led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Uzbekistan (April 2003) and by the European Union in Austria (October 2004), as well as in an exercise held in Geneva in April 2005 in the framework of the regional INSARAG network of Austria, Germany and Switzerland. More than 50 countries and disaster response organizations from all regions of the world participated in the exercises.

C. Regional disaster response preparedness activities

68. The INSARAG secretariat, supported by the respective host Governments, organized INSARAG regional meetings in Kobe, Japan (November 2003), Tunis, Tunisia (April 2004), Lima, Peru (August 2004), Singapore (September 2004) and Geneva (April 2004). The regional meetings were attended by disaster management officials from disaster-prone and responding countries in the region. Regional INSARAG meetings provide a platform for decision makers and senior disaster

managers to discuss regional cooperation, with an emphasis on national capacity-building for emergency response preparedness.

69. The INSARAG secretariat, supported by the Governments of the Republic of Korea and Singapore, organized worldwide meetings of international search and rescue team leaders in Seoul (November 2003) and Singapore (September 2004) to enable practitioners to discuss technical and operational collapsed-structure rescue issues, with the aim of improving performance standards of international teams and their on-site coordination during emergencies. The secretariat also conducted training courses in Hungary (February 2004), Tunisia (February 2004 and April 2005), Indonesia (May 2004) and Estonia (November 2004), in which the INSARAG methodology was introduced to disaster managers at all administrative levels of some 40 disaster-prone countries.

70. In order to facilitate the absorption of INSARAG methodology in Arabic and French-speaking countries of North Africa and the Middle East, in April 2004 the Governments of Tunisia, Switzerland and Germany, in cooperation with the INSARAG secretariat, established an INSARAG regional antenna office in Tunis to translate INSARAG documents into Arabic and French and disseminate them in the region.

D. Guidelines of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group

71. In order to ensure their wide distribution and use within the INSARAG network, the INSARAG guidelines have been translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean and Spanish. They were widely used by the international urban search and rescue community during the response to the earthquakes that occurred in the reporting period and in all of the earthquake response exercises mentioned above.

72. Between 2003 and 2005 the INSARAG guidelines were revised by an interregional working group. The revisions improved and updated the INSARAG coordination methodology by incorporating the lessons learned from recent earthquakes. The revised guidelines also include agreed standards for classification of international search and rescue teams according to their capabilities in collapsed-structure rescue. These will assist national authorities and the international community in improving the quality and timeliness of international urban search and rescue assistance.

E. Challenges and recommendations

Stopping the deployment of excess international search and rescue teams

73. One of the major challenges facing the INSARAG community is to develop a system whereby responding Governments, on the basis of the advice of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team on site and the INSARAG secretariat, stop the deployment of additional international search and rescue teams when they are not required. Since teams are provided on the basis of bilateral agreements between affected and responding Governments, it is recommended that responding Governments follow the advice given by the

INSARAG secretariat. During the earthquake in Bam, Islamic Republic of Iran, the INSARAG secretariat had some success in stopping the deployment of teams through the use of the virtual on-site operations coordination centre.

Resolving administrative bottlenecks

74. By its resolution 57/150, the General Assembly urged States to simplify and reduce administrative bottlenecks that slow the entry, deployment and exit of international urban search and rescue teams with their supplies and equipment. So far, only New Zealand has clear guidelines on this issue. The Governments of Algeria, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Morocco did waive normal customs and immigration procedures to facilitate the arrival of international teams following the recent earthquakes in their countries. Other earthquake-prone countries must take action on this matter.

Safety and security of international staff

75. According to General Assembly resolution 57/150 and the INSARAG guidelines, it is the responsibility of States to ensure the safety and security of international search and rescue staff working in the country. In the high stress and emotional situation following an earthquake, Governments should pay particular attention to this matter. They should also include this issue in their national disaster response plans.

On-site coordination

76. Smooth on-site coordination in the event of a major disaster involving both national and international responders is a major challenge. UNDAC teams are routinely deployed to assist the local and national authorities in this respect. The earthquake in Bam, Islamic Republic of Iran, proved to be one of the better examples of on-site coordination as a result of close cooperation between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian Red Crescent Society and the UNDAC team. It is recommended that Governments of disaster-prone countries include the utilization of the UNDAC team in their national response plans and disaster response exercises.

V. Recommendations

77. **Relevant United Nations organizations and donor Governments should strengthen the capacity of disaster-prone countries in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and post-disaster recovery within a disaster risk reduction framework, by supporting relevant initiatives in this field.**

78. **Regional organizations in disaster-prone regions should play a greater role in disaster risk reduction and management by devising regional-level programmes and by supporting the efforts undertaken by the countries of the region.**

79. **Relevant United Nations organizations and donor Governments should enhance the level of preparedness of disaster-prone countries, particularly at the local level, by significantly increasing funding for preparedness activities.**

80. All providers of relief assistance should take concrete steps to maximize the participation of beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of relief programmes.

81. All providers of relief assistance should devise concrete mechanisms to enhance the level of accountability to beneficiaries to ensure that the provision of assistance is based on the needs of the affected populations.

82. The United Nations should strengthen civil-military coordination mechanisms at both the headquarters and the field levels. The Organization should continue to develop and implement the United Nations humanitarian civil-military coordination concept to further consolidate the civil-military coordination system, including the development of national standby teams with Member States.

83. Relevant United Nations organizations and Member States should enhance the global capacity for sustainable post-disaster recovery in areas such as coordination with traditional and non-traditional partners; identification and dissemination of lessons learned; development of common tools and mechanisms for recovery needs assessment, strategy development and programming; and incorporation of risk reduction into all recovery processes. International financial institutions are encouraged to fully participate in such efforts so as to increase the overall effect of sustainable recovery practices.

84. Member States should implement the priorities set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action in support of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and, in particular, incorporate practical disaster reduction steps into sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies, as well as in disaster preparedness and response.